DECLINING OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES

by:
Melissa N. Mizon
OIC- Principal, Bangkal Resettlement Elementary School

English is used as a medium of instruction in the Philippines Education system from pre-school to post graduate level. According to some people, learning English is easy even young children who are just beginning to speak can already use the language. Sometimes they know more English than Filipino words. But it is not true today because recent study shows that there is a declining of English Proficiency in the Philippines.

Before the Philippines has been preferred voice outsourcing destination because of the Filipinos acknowledged proficiency in the English language. Hopkins International Trade Inc. conducted a two-year study that indicate the English proficiency level of College graduates in the Philippines. Based on the results of the study, the English proficiency level of College graduates in the Philippines is lower than the proficiency target for high school students in Thailand and the competency requirements for a taxi driver in abroad. That is the reason why restructuring of the Philippine basic educational system was established through K to 12 program which intended to produce competent graduates.

It is also observed and seen that the ability to understand and speak English is the waterloo among Filipino nurses. Although, they fare well on required technical and patient-care skills but fail in the language proficiency, particularly in the Test of Spoken English where only 16% of the examinees passed and 84% of them failed.

In the Licensure Examination and English Proficiency Test the fresh graduates teachers also displayed very poor in English language skills, scoring lowest in English of all the tested areas. Former Cebu Representative Eduardo Gullas mentioned in one of his
media interview that Filipino engineers in the Middle East risk being dislodged by Indian and Chinese engineers who can speak, analyze and write reports better in English.

The booming industries these days are call center and business processing. However, out of 100 applicants for call center positions, only less than seven percent (7%) are hired because of inadequate English skills. One of the reasons why job applicants fail the initial interview is the poor spoken English. That is the reason why many entry-level positions in accounting, finance, sales, certain IT, engineering positions and customer service go unfilled.

A lot of possible factors had been linked to the deterioration of English proficiency, including but not limited to an overall decline in the Philippine Education. The major contributing factors for the decline are the exodus of teachers, especially in English and Math, to job overseas and the lack of competence and training among teachers. Tagalog and Mother Tongue had been a common language of instruction in the schools over the years. On the other hand, media have their fair share of blame on how we write and speak in English because they propagate the use of hybrid language called TAGLISH in their programming. Many of English sitcoms were dub in Tagalog.

All of us in the Philippines are aware that English is the best language to communicate globally. English is the language that we can use the most when we are seeking employment abroad and even in non-English speaking countries. There is a program launched in the Philippines in the last two decades called PEP, which aims to improve the level of proficiency in English among teachers, students, employees and OFW through the training and certifications of Filipinos using internationally credible English test. They trained teachers as well as students to become mentors in 2008. They also put up computerized English language centers in various schools including Cebu Normal University, University of Mindanao, Cagayan de Oro College and De La Salle University- Lipa. All of these schools were benefiting from the project.
In addition, Self-awareness is the key to learning English language to avoid nose bleeding when conversing in English. The incoming workforce or College students should acknowledge the need to enhance their English- language skills and motivate themselves to learn them. They should also try to surf the Net for free self-improvement. Even though, we do not speak English at home and we seldom do too at school. Let us try to read a lot of short stories, observed basic grammar constructions, applying what we learned from school. Then our self-training progressed to watching English movies with subtitles. While we were listening to pronunciation we should also read the words at the bottom of the TV screen. Lastly, there were times that we blame untrained teachers, nationalism, error-filled textbook, Dep.Ed. and CHED on English decline, but never ourselves. We should continue to polish and improve our English language skills in order to reclaim and regain the Philippines pride of being provider of world class labor force.

References:

DECLINING OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN THE PHILIPPINES, retrieve from, https://www.philstar.com/